

OS ANGELES COUNTY MUSEUM

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LOS ANGELES COUNTY MUSEUM

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Bulletin of the Art Division of the Los Angeles County Museum



A Collection of English Costumes of the Georgian Period

THE costumes presented in this issue of the Bulletin, and concurrently in an exhibition in the Costume and Textile Gallery of the Museum, cover the century from 1730 to 1830. These newest additions to the rapidly growing costume collection were selected from various sources during the curator's recent trip to England and purchased by the Museum with part of the proceeds from the 1957 Museum Gala given by the Costume Council and the Fashion Group. We are particularly fortunate in having obtained so many examples (Number 1 through 26) from the renowned collection of the distinguished author and fashion expert, Doris Langley Moore, which was, until recently, on exhibition at the Eridge Castle Museum of historic costumes.

The beauty and interest of these acquisitions are rivaled by their historic importance. They are extremely rare specimens, in excellent state of preservation, and they represent an era of great, fundamental social transitions which left indelible imprints on the taste and ways of life. These changes were reflected in architecture, interior decoration, literature—in all branches of the arts, including the art of apparel.

The period of 1730 to 1830 in England is that of Georges II, III, and IV, which corresponds approximately with that of Louis XV and XVI, the Directoire, Napoleon's Empire and Louis XVIII in France. Even as today, France was the dictator of fashions, eagerly obeyed by practically all of Europe. At the same time Paris was intently watching changes in English attire, and

borrowed many of its attractive features, especially during the last two decades of the 18th century, so that the trends of fashion in each country had an influence upon the dressmakers' and tailors' artistry in the other.

Here it should be recalled that costumes of historical interest are as a rule those of the upper classes, the royal *entourage*, and the nobility whose precious garments were carefully preserved, and not the clothes of the careworn burgher and his hard-working wife, or of the peasantry, which were worn until threadbare, hence seldom, and then usually only accidentally preserved.

Our examples are, most fortunately, in their original state. Here and there a perished ribbon or disintegrated lace, or a lost stomacher has been replaced by suitable old material, in order to give the exhibit its correct appearance; but otherwise there has been no alteration, and no substitution of any essential detail.

The hundred years covered by this array can be divided into five distinct phases. During the reign of George II (1727-1760) of England, and of Louis XV (1743-1774) of France, the styles were pompous, rigid and ostentatious, and the dress materials were accordingly ornamental to extravagance, and comparatively stiff.

The next phase was the first three decades of the rule of George III (1760-1820) and Louis XVI (1774-1792) when easy grace was reflected in modes and materials.

Raymond Cox, Director of the Historical Museum of Textiles, of the Lyons Chamber of Com-

merce, gives a pleasant and lucid description of those materials; "The elegant silks of the Louis XV period constitute a unique category, while those of Louis XVI had given us exquisite beauty, and the charm of incomparable freshness. Never have artists produced anything more graceful, more attractively ingenuous, and at the same time, more typically French. Their art mirrors the brightness of youth. Nothing could better express the idyllic feeling of spring of the Petit Trianon. This may be due to the flowery or lyrical and rustic motifs employed, or to the adoption of the restraint of the Davidian school which was the first to introduce reminiscences of antiquity . . . It is certain that [the discoveries of ancient works of art at] Pompeii had furnished the examples. They were also helped by the outstanding manual skill which was never strained to excess, and by all the delicate refinements which characterized even their lesser artistic designs."

The French Revolution inaugurated, not only in France but all over Europe, a completely new social atmosphere, and this was the beginning of the third phase in the attitude and ideals of the people of the time.

In the course of the years when discontent was brewing in many countries, until it exploded in the French Revolution, men and women gradually discarded the many impediments forced upon them by the demands of fashion. The exaggerated, powdered wigs became modest in size, until they were retained only by professional men, and some old-fashioned, elderly gentlemen. Next, the very stiff, highly uncomfortable stays were abandoned. Then the very voluminous skirts of the men's coats and waistcoats were reduced in width and length, while the very full skirts of the women were made smaller step-by-step, and the heavy and clumsy hoops were dispensed with.

Nevertheless, in England, a country always reluctant to part with tradition, the court-dress for women still included the form-concealing hoop skirt, until it was finally abolished by George IV (1820-1830) in the first year of his accession to the British throne. (A charming example of one of the last court-gowns over hoops is our specimen No. 12.)

To continue to quote from Raymond Cox's excellent study: "The transition was abrupt and drastic. In their naïve frankness, the masses had clearly indicated their practical good sense. They proclaimed universal freedom of thought and action. Consequently, individualism had forced

elegance into the background. Self-expression became the general tendency, and the people refused to abide by the dictates of princely fantasies. The women demanded soft and supple fabrics which revealed their figures. The sumptuous tissues of the previous regimes were too rigid, and concealed the shape of the body."

Silks and velvets were cast aside, and muslin became the favorite material for women. At this time the first pair of men's trousers had made its appearance. Until then, breeches had been universally worn.

This was the trend under the Directoire (1793-1801) in France, as in England and most of the rest of Europe.

The fourth phase began with the establishment of Napoleon's Empire (1804-1814) when the newly created aristocracy avidly reverted to the glory of earlier royal times, but retained its preference for the styles and materials which were comfortable to wear, and permitted ease of movement.

The dethronement of Napoleon, and Restoration of the Bourbon dynasty in France in 1814, followed by the rehabilitation of the old French nobility and the retirement of the short-lived new aristocracy, brought about the fifth turning point in social outlook, spiritual re-orientation, new manners and new fashions. These, of course, had a prompt, and very strong influence on the tastes of the British.

The very high waist of the "Grecian" gown began to descend. Many influences began to alter the style of dress for women as well as for men. The broad, graceful shoulder-line, and the first signs of the tight waist made their appearance. The slender, hipless line became outmoded, and women once more assumed the feminine look, and in this were the first signs of the approaching "Romantic" period.

A separate little group in this exhibition is a small selection of sombre clothing of Queen Victoria, which belong to a much later period. It contains a black taffeta bodice, and a very full skirt, made for a short and corpulent figure. The arrangement of the crepe indicates the second, relaxed stage of court mourning, probably around 1880.

An elaborate, yet not pretentious hat is trimmed with the crest-feathers of the Victoria crowned pigeon, a native of New Guinea; the black and white artificial thistles represent the emblem of Scotland. The crown is enshrouded in black and white silk, and the narrow brim is edged with black Chantilly lace.

STEFANIA HOLT



LITERATURE:

Cunnington, *English Costume in the 18th Century*.
Langley Moore, *The Woman in Fashion*.
Laver, *Taste and Fashion*.
Cox, *Les Soieries d'Art*.
Davenport, *The Book of Costume*.
Laver, *Clothes*.
Brooke and Laver, *English Costume from the 14th through 19th Century*.

1. CORSET. Pastel blue moiré. Completely rigid in front; densely boned at sides and back. Lower end of bust protruding. Shoulder straps tied with ribbon. Sham lacing of thin cord in front; real lacing at back. Lined with coarse linen. 1730s or earlier.

6. PETTICOAT. Pink sarsenet, gathered irregularly, and sewn to linen lining, producing a "petal" effect. Tied with tape attached to waistband. c. 1760.



2. DRESS and PETTICOAT. Heavy white taffeta; self-patterned ground, brocaded with brightly colored floral design, and metallic gold zig-zag lines. Neckline edged with pleats (robings) which taper to the low waist. Half-length sleeves; graded frills at elbows. Belted with puffed strip of same material, edged with narrow, gold passementerie. Petticoat of same material, pleated to waistband; tied with tape. Lower hem edged with narrow, gold passementerie.
1730s

3. HAT (Not illustrated). Natural gold colored pedal straw. Wide, round brim. Small, flat crown. Red satin ribbon tied in a bow in front of crown. Two streamers of same ribbon hang on both sides of brim. (The original ribbon perished, and has been replaced by similar ribbon of the same period.)
Mid-18th century.

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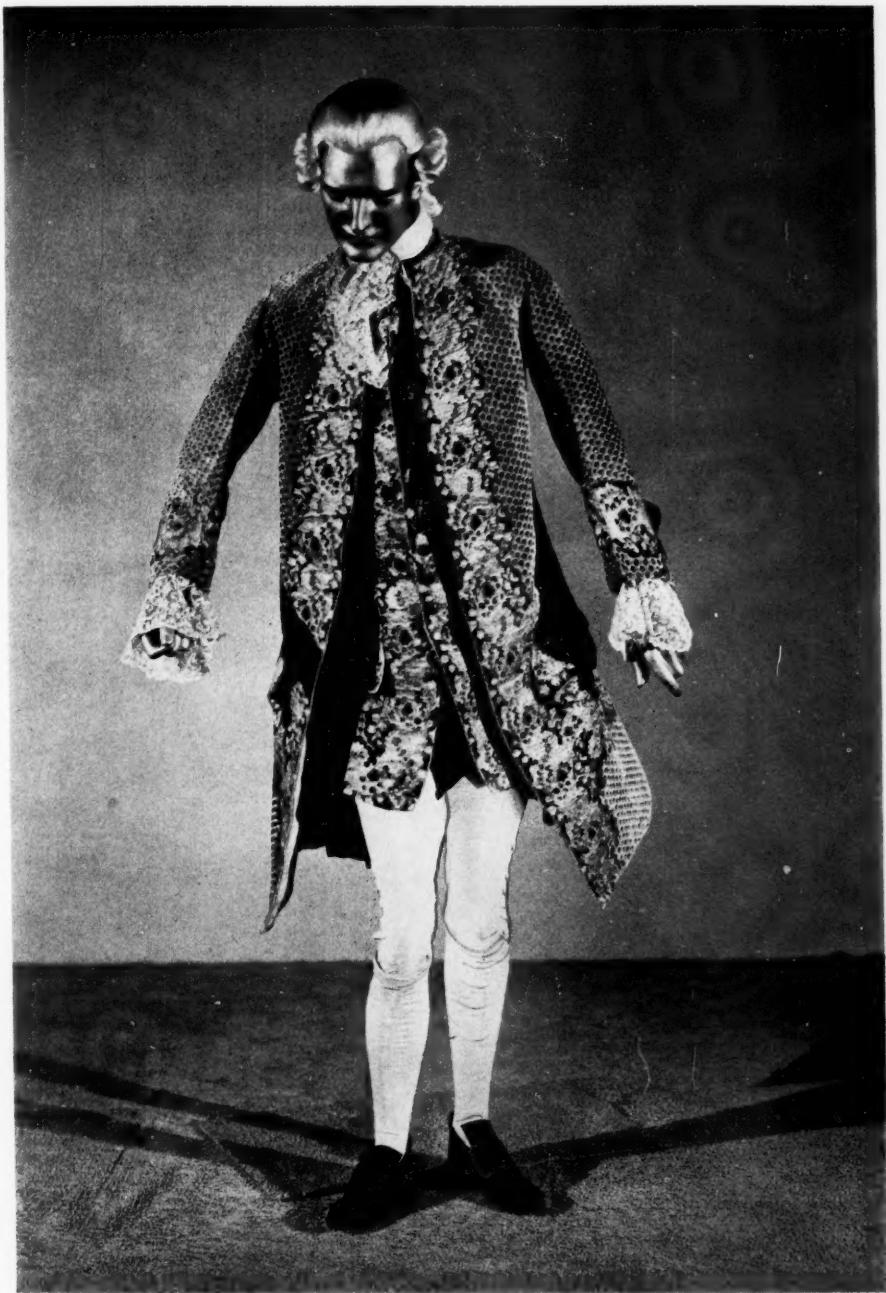


4. DRESS and PETTICOAT. Peach-colored taffeta with broad green, and narrow multicolored woven stripes. Open in front to below waist. The opening is edged with pinked ruching of the same material, and fastened with three bows of dark green silk rib-
bon, (attached for display only). Half-length sleeves. (The lace ruffles at the elbows are of later date.) Petticoat of same material, heavily decorated with flounces, bows, and pinked ruffles, all of the same material. *Third quarter of 18th century.*



5. DRESS and PETTICOAT. White, figured satin richly brocaded with fine floral design in brilliant colors. Appliquéd French artificial flowers made of ribbon. Round neckline. Stomacher with three bows

of same material. Half-length sleeves with large frills at the elbows. Edges and hem trimmed with gathered frills of same material. *Third quarter of 18th century.*



MAN'S COAT and WAISTCOAT. Oyster-color (originally mauve—still visible where the material was not exposed to light) with tiny flower pattern. Cut and uncut velvet; the design was arranged in weaving to conform with the shapes of the completed garments. Heavy ornamentation of the same velvet, with additional blue and green flower design and gold thread along the front edges, on the skirt,

cuffs and two pocket flaps. Ample skirt with two slits. Lined with pearl-grey satin. Waistcoat reaching to middle of thigh, single breasted; same material, same ornamentation. Two side pockets with lapels. Thirteen round, slightly convex, brass buttons down center (one missing). Laced at back. France, Louis XV period and style, c. 1750.



7. DRESS and PETTICOAT. Heavy white taffeta; self-patterned ground, and large, brocaded silver flowers. Two folds (robings) around the neck to waist in shawl-like effect. Half-length sleeves with large, double frills at the elbows. Narrow silver

lace around the elbow frills, waist and in double wavy lines along both front edges of the overskirt which has *à la française* pleats at back. Lined with linen. Petticoat of same material; draping edged with narrow silver lace. c. 1770.



28. GOWN. Floral embroidery in many bright colors on white ground. Silk and linen mixture. V neck. Half-length sleeves. Large flounces of same mate-

rial, edged with narrow, green silk passementerie at the elbows. *England, third quarter of 18th century.*



8. DRESS and PETTICOAT. Pink taffeta, brocaded with sparse floral designs in bright colors. *Robe à la polonoise*. Low, square neckline. Three-quarter length sleeves, edged with pleated, pinked ruches. Mores ruches of same material down center of bo-

dice (with pointed front) and all along edge of overskirt which can be gathered up by means of large buttons and loops. Petticoat has pleated flounce over lower hem. c. 1780.

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9. OVERCOAT. Blue moiré silk. Redingot style. Floor-length. Stand-up collar. Pointed lapels. Pointed cape. Fitted waist. Long sleeves. Two buttons on each cuff. Eleven flat, round buttons, cov-

ered with own material (one missing), down center front. Same four buttons on military type, rear flaps. Skirt gathered in many pleats at waist. Top part lined with linen. c. 1790.



10. DRESS AND PETTICOAT. Bodice and attached overskirt of brocaded buff silk with dense, tiny, diamond-shaped pattern, and sparse, small flowers in gold, green and red. Oval neckline. Narrow, long sleeves, edged with brown silk ribbon, and narrow,

brown lace. Front edges of overskirt are hemmed with white and brown lace ruffles. (Original perished, and has been replaced by later, genuine Mechlin lace.) Petticoat (perished original replaced by solid beige satin with lace flounce at lower edge.)
c. 1790.



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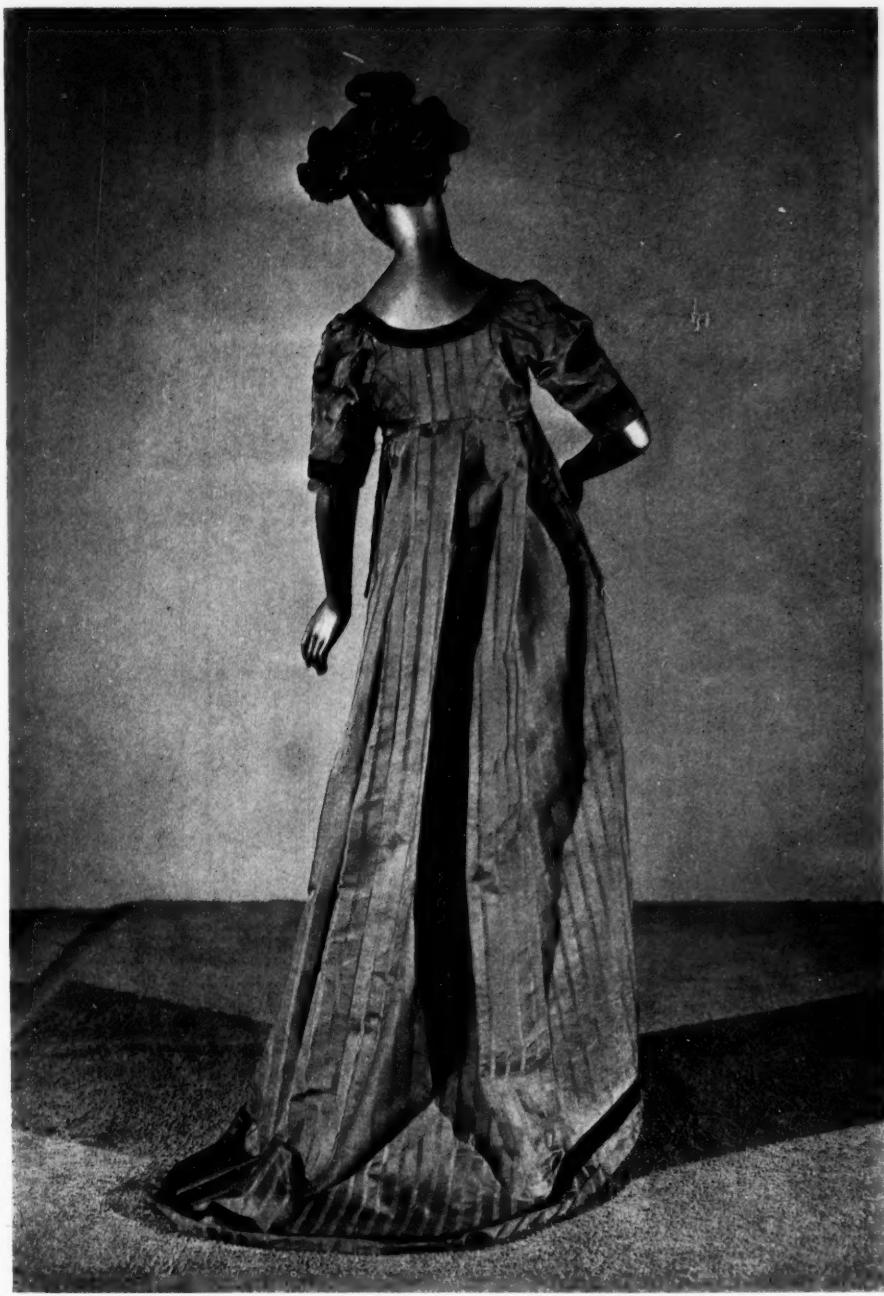
11. GOWN. White muslin sparsely embroidered with colored flower design, and tiny crescents of silver (now tarnished). V neck surrounded by folds of the

material presenting a shawl-like effect. Open down the front. Pointed flaps at the shoulders over satin half-sleeves. Floor length. c. 1790.



12. COURT GOWN. White muslin. Delicate gold embroidery. Thin gold fringe along both edges of draping from neckline to lower hem of skirt, which has a gold and white fringe. Made to be worn over

hoops. (At this period, hoops were worn almost exclusively at the Royal Court of Great Britain only. In 1820, they were abolished by George IV.) Train. c. 1800.



13. GOWN. Cerise grosgrain. Deep, round neckline. Half-length sleeves. One inch wide black velvet band runs parallel with the neckline, and above the hem of sleeves, and lower edge of skirt. (Some of the black velvet band has been replaced.) Narrow

band of same cerise material around the high waistline. Fastens at both sides of the bodice. Short train. Illustrated in Langley Moore's *The Woman in Fashion*, facing p. 34.) c. 1801.



14. GOWN. Two shades of yellow pin-striped silk. Low, rounded neckline. Long sleeves. Front of bodice has two sham-openings laced with cord. Actual openings on each side are fastened by one small, round button (covered with same material) on each side. High waist tied in front with narrow band of same material. Instep-length, plain skirt with medium train. Lined with linen. c. 1804.

15. HEADDRESS. (Not illustrated) Trelliswork; wire, covered with rose satin. Imitation pearls forming circle on top, sewn to all intersections, and hanging in clusters near the ears. (Some pearls missing). c. 1805.

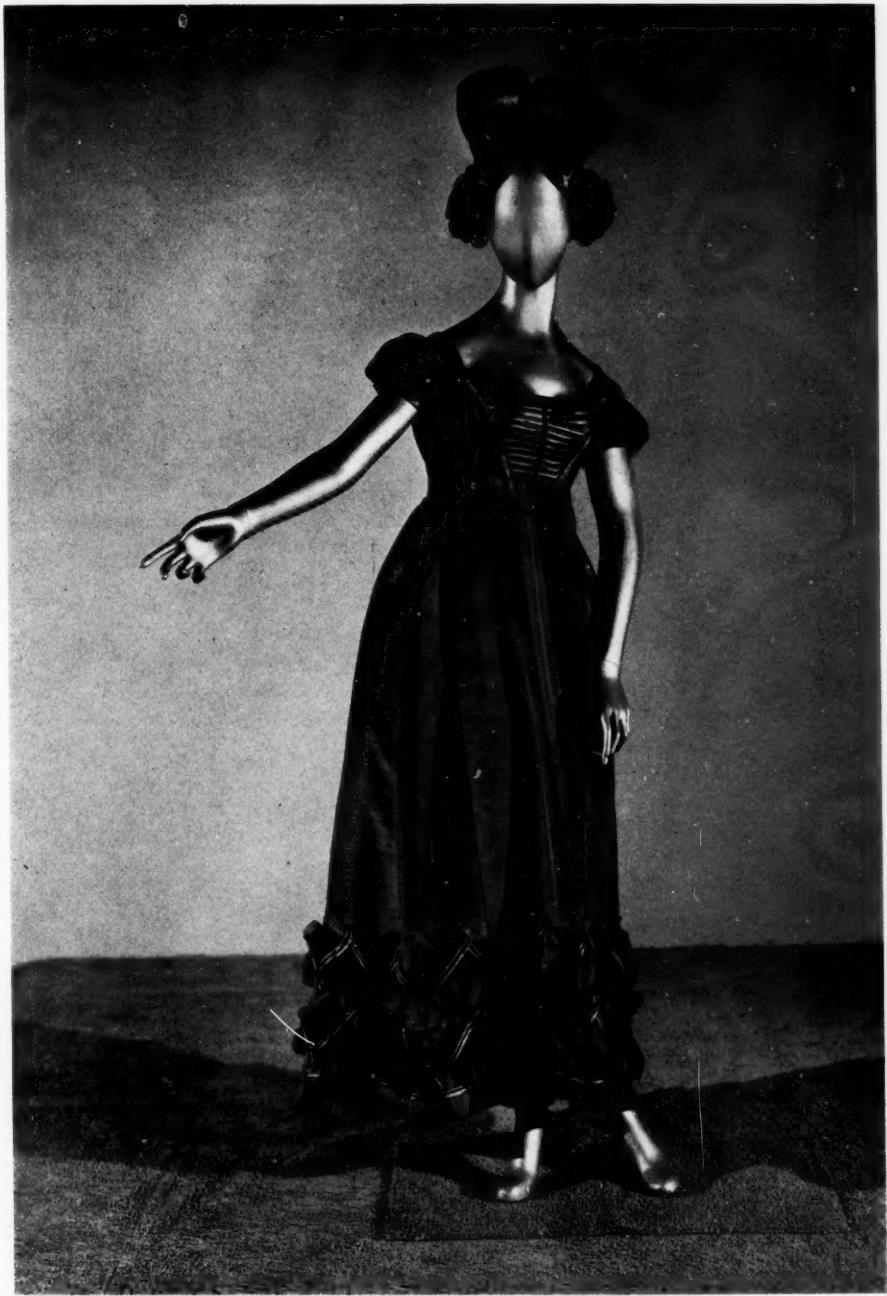


16. GOWN. White muslin. Most of the trimmings consist of inserted puffs of the same muslin; around the neck, and around the lower part of the skirt. Two embroidered flounces. c. 1815.



17. GOWN. White tulle with embroidered and appliquéd white flowers. Round neckline edged with gathered blonde lace. Short, puffed sleeves edged with lace. Rows of white satin rouleaux arranged fan-shape on front of bodice. Rows of small steel beads. High waist. Lower part of skirt very elaborately trimmed with chenille flowers, embroideries, spangles, braid and strass. 1816.

(This gown is said, and correctly it would seem, to have been worn at a ball by Princess Charlotte, daughter of George IV, shortly before her wedding in 1816. The size conforms to the measurements of Princess Charlotte's wedding dress in the London Museum.)



18. GOWN. Deep crimson; silk and mohair mixture. Short puff sleeves. Same color silk rouleaux in graduated horizontal lines on front of bodice. More rouleaux on the shoulders. Fastens with concealed

hooks-and-eyes at back. Same color gauze trim held by trelliswork of rouleaux above lower edge of ankle-length skirt. c. 1822.



19. PELISSE. Lilac taffeta (much faded). Turn-down, small, round collar. From shoulder to lower hem of skirt, very elaborate, double row of appliqué trim, in the shape of leaves and stems, of the same mate-

rial. Leg-of-mutton sleeves. Cuffs indicated by four bands of same material. Ample trim of same material around lower hem of skirt. Fastens with hooks-and-eyes in front, from neck to waist. Lined with silk. 1824.



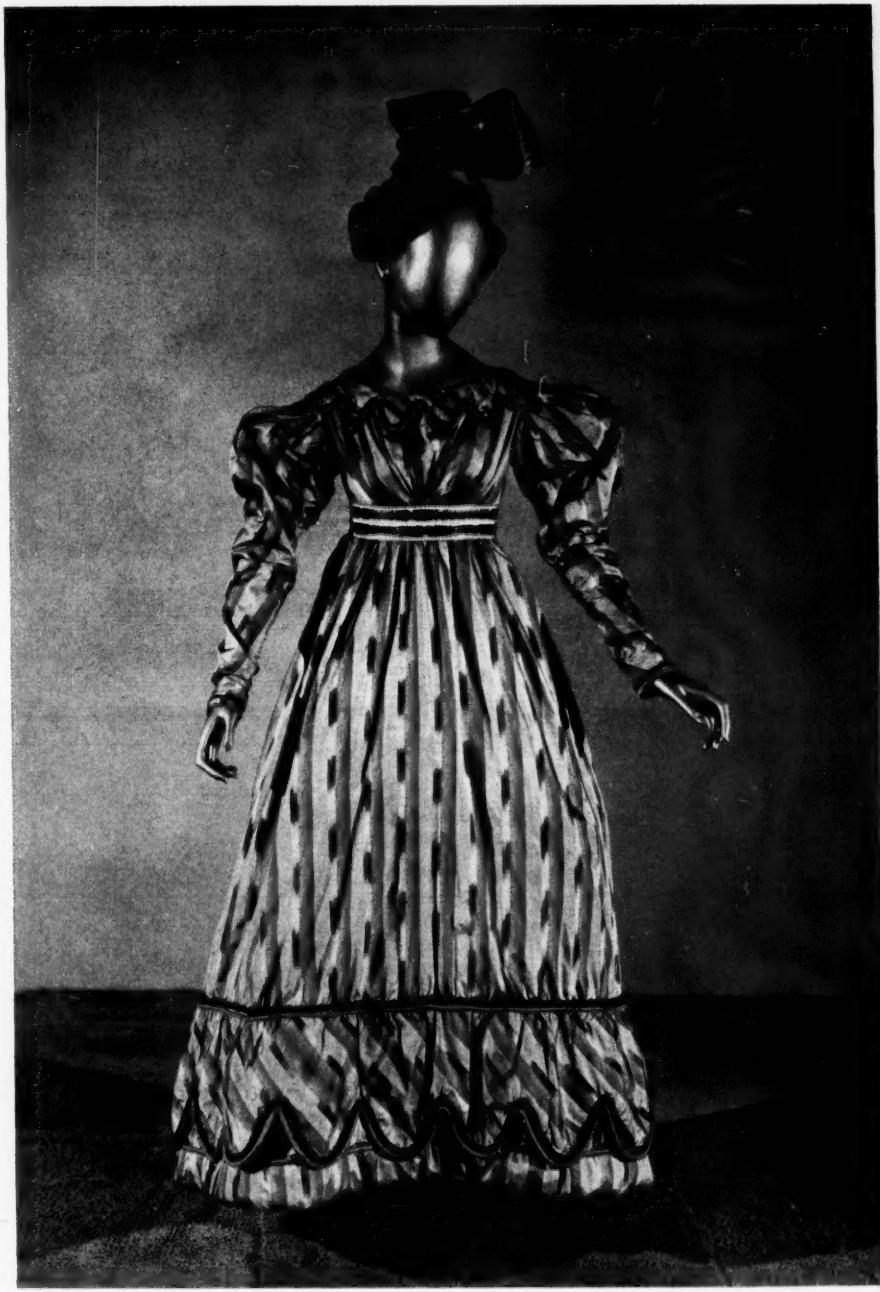
10. GOWN. Glossy, rose red taffeta. Slightly curved neckline edged with narrow blonde lace. Two flaps of same taffeta, edged with same lace, over each shoulder. Long gauze sleeves, rose red cuffs with upturned gauze scallops edged with rose red taffeta. Puffs of same taffeta on shoulders under the gauze sleeves. Heart-shaped ornamentation on front of

bodice consisting of rouleaux arranged in floral pattern. More rouleaux over shoulders. High waistline, pointed in front. Lacing at back. Fan-shaped flaps of same taffeta above and around lower edge of the ankle-length skirt. 1825. (Reproduced in color as frontispiece of Langley Moore's *The Woman in Fashion*.)



21. PELISSE. Emerald green corded silk. Broad, turned-down collar. Leg-of-mutton sleeves. High waistband of same material. Six bows of same material down center front, below waist. Front edges

trimmed with wavy strips of green silk. Hooks-and-eyes in front center of top only. Top lined with silk. Belonged to the Hon. Honoria Harrington-Carr-Harrington. c. 1828.



22. GOWN. Red, gold, pink and brown striped taffeta. Round neckline with scallops edged with pink and green rouleaux. High waistband (belt substituted) of same material. Leg-of-mutton sleeves. Hooks-and-eyes at back. Lined with linen. Lower part of

skirt has large, scalloped flounces of same material edged with pink and brown rouleaux. Belonged to the Hon. Honoria Harrington-Carr-Harrington. c. 1828.



23. HAT. Grey moire silk. Blonde lace (some of it has been replaced). Broad silk ribbons. Bird of paradise feathers. The brim is wide in front, and on the sides. Gathered silk flounce at back. c. 1828.



29. BONNET. Dark plum-colored taffeta (probably originally black, now faded). The brim is wide in front, and on the sides, and edged with narrow black lace. Taffeta flounce at back. High draped crown, stand-up flounce in front, and bows, all of the same material. Two faille ribbons. England. c. 1825.



30. BONNET. Leghorn straw. High crown. The brim is broad in front, and at the sides; edged with grey taffeta ribbon. Broad band of grey taffeta with satin stripes in mottled colors. England, c. 1825.



25. HAT OF QUEEN VICTORIA. Pedal straw. Elaborate trim of black and white striped gauze ribbon, and white silk bow. Natural black and white feathers of the Victoria crowned pigeon (native of New Guinea), and artificial, black and white thistles (emblem of Scotland). Narrow brim edged with black Chantilly lace over gathered cream chiffon. Inscription on lining, "To Her Majesty the Queen and the Royal Family, Robert Heath, 25 St. George's Place, Hyde Park Corner. Estabd. 1849." c. 1880.

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